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# Italy's Contribution to the Great Victory

BY

An American Observer in Italy

"The writer of the following pages was an official in the American Service who was stationed in Italy for a year and a half during 1917 and 1918. His duties took him to all parts of Italy and brought him in contact with all sorts and conditions of men and women of that country. His opportunities for observing and for gathering accurate information were unlimited."

*With a few words of explanation by Herbert L. Satterlee,  
formerly Assistant Secretary of the U. S. Navy.*

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## FOREWORD.

The writer of the following pages was an official in the American Service, who was stationed in Italy for a year and a half during 1917 and 1918. His duties took him to all parts of Italy, and brought him in contact with all sorts and conditions of men and women of that country. His opportunities for observing and for gathering accurate information were unlimited. He went to Italy a skeptic as to Italy's efficient assistance to the Allied Cause. On his return to America he was shocked to discover the general ignorance of things Italian in his own country, but was gratified to find a strong desire to hear the truth about them. Whenever he talked of Italy, he found interested and sympathetic listeners, who were amazed to learn what he had to disclose. As a result, he was asked to jot down the gist of these conversations, which he has been most willing to do in the hope that thereby he will reach a larger audience.

As will be evident, no attempt at literary composition, or an historic essay on Italy's contribution to the war, has been attempted. It is more a connected recital of random conversations, relying upon the vivid impressions burned into his memory by the events narrated, and supplemented by reference to personal letters written at the time to his friends. While frankly and purposely pro-Italian, the writer has sternly resisted any temptation to exaggerate the truth as to facts and conditions, and hopes and believes that he has recorded a just and moderate estimate of Italy's attitude and accomplishments during the Great War.





## Italy's Contribution to the Great Victory

For one reason or another, it makes no difference what, Italy's contribution to the Great Victory and her enormous sacrifices and efforts have been very little appreciated, at least outside of Italy. The Italian is naturally extremely modest and I found him continually minimizing his country's achievements and lauding, even extravagantly, the efforts and achievements of his friends. It was my duty and great privilege to be closely associated with the Italians in Italy for a year and a half during 1917 and 1918. I record some of my impressions, gained at first hand, in the hope that they will enable others to know, appreciate and love Italy as I learned to do during her hour of greatest trial and during the moment of her greatest triumph.

I do not want to be understood as saying "Italy won the war," for this is at once correct and incorrect. It would be absurd to make such a statement without qualifications; but it is nevertheless unquestionably true that the war could not have been won without Italy anymore than it could have been won without England, France, Belgium, Russia or the United States. All six countries contributed in varying degrees to the victory, for the failure of any one would have spelled defeat for the Allied cause. These countries were like links of various sizes and strength in a chain, the parting of any one of which would have meant the parting of the chain.

### *Italy's First Service.*

It is a fact, known, but little appreciated, that Italy first saved the war in July, 1914. I refer to the fact that the Italian Ambassador in London informed Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, that the efforts to maintain peace would fail and that war was inevitable and immediate. It was on the strength of this tip that Winston Churchill kept the British fleet intact after the great naval review at Portsmouth the end of July, 1914. Had the fleet been dispersed, as was planned, and as the Germans counted on, the German fleet would have made an attack in force with a fair chance in their favor of destroying the British fleet in detail.

### *Italy's Second Service.*

The second time that Italy saved the war for the Allies was in September, 1914, when Baron Sonnino, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, assured the French Government that under no circumstances would Italy join the Central Powers, and that France need fear no attack by Italy on her southern frontier. This information released 300,000 French troops who had been guarding the Italian frontier, and formed the army of manoeuvre which won the first battle of the Marne, and saved the war. Both these assurances of Italy's friendship for the Entente were given freely and voluntarily and with no expectation of reward. The latter assurance was given at a time when all the world believed that Germany was about to win a swift and smashing victory, and when people less generous than the Italian Government might have been expected to throw all their weight with the winning side in the hope of reaping a reward. Our debt of gratitude for this unselfish act of Italy's can never be paid.

### *Italy's Third Service.*

Italy's third great contribution to the Allied victory was her declaration of war against Austria on the 24th of May, 1915. This was an extremely courageous move on the part of the Italians, for at that time the fortunes of the Central Empires were still on the ascendant and it looked as though nothing could prevent their complete victory.

### *The Reason for Italy's Delay.*

Unthinking people sometimes criticize Italy for delaying so long in entering the war. These same people, however, should remember that the United States delayed two years longer. It must also be considered how much more difficult Italy's position was than ours. In the first place, Italy is not by any means a rich nation and war meant untold sacrifices in treasure and in blood. Italy's territory adjoined that of Austria along the frontier of some five hundred miles. All the mountain passes along this frontier were in Austrian hands and were strongly fortified. The Trentino was thrust like a dagger into the very heart of the industrial section of Italy. On the Italian side of the frontier were fertile plains on which were located most of Italy's prosperous

provinces and nearly all her manufactures. All this was exposed to invasion by Italy's declaration of war. For Americans, with three thousand miles of ocean between them and Europe, it is difficult to realize what this means. Italy, however, well knew what it meant, as she had experienced Austrian invasions many times before, and she had had recent examples of what Hun invasions could be. Poor Italy! She was soon to see for herself what Belgium and France and Servia had felt and seen.

When Italy's situation is understood she should not be criticized for not having entered the war immediately. In addition to the physical risks of invasion, air-raids, destruction of commerce, etc., it must be remembered that for nearly two generations Italy has been in alliance with the Central Powers. Almost the entire population of Italy has been brought up with the belief that these powers were her friends and that her salvation lay with them. For generations many of her best families had intermarried with the Germans and Austrians. The Central Powers had obtained an economic grip on Italy which it was believed nothing could break. They had sold Italy goods at low prices (often less than cost) and on long credits; they virtually controlled the banks and the hotels of Italy; they had built many of the railways, street car lines, electric light plants, etc.; hundreds of thousands of young Italian workmen were induced by high wages to go to Germany, where they learned their trades and then returned to their native land completely under the influence of German propaganda. During the eight months previous to Italy's entrance into the war the German propaganda in that country was almost unbelievable in its extent and persistency. Their most astute diplomat, Prince von Bülow, with his charming and popular Italian wife, was sent to Italy in the endeavor not to induce Italy to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers, but to induce her merely to remain neutral. Austria offered to cede to Italy practically the whole of the Trentino, Trieste, Istria and part of Dalmatia, for Italy's mere neutrality.

In addition to these considerations there was another, and a very strong factor working for Italian neutrality; I refer to the Italian Socialists and to the strong political leader, Giolitti. If it is possible to conceive a political organization having a nation-wide influence comparable to the influence of Tammany Hall in New York, then



one may imagine what the Giolitti machine was in Italy. It practically controlled the politician from one end of the country to the other. I have heard it estimated that Giolitti could elect or defeat three-quarters of the deputies in Parliament. Giolitti had been Prime Minister. He firmly believed that the interests of Italy lay on the side of the Central Powers and not on the side of the Entente. He threw the enormous weight of his political machine into the scales against Italy's entrance into the war. He was enthusiastically supported in this by the Socialists, who were particularly strong in the great prosperous industrial centers of the north.

### *Why Italy Entered the War.*

Those who are inclined to criticise Italy for her delay, show a pitiable lack of knowledge of conditions in Italy, or an unwillingness to read frankly and fairly of these conditions. The wonder is not that Italy delayed eight months, but that she entered at all. Why, then, *did* Italy enter the war? No one reason may be assigned. Italy's enemies have tried to make it appear that she simply sold herself to the highest bidder. This is the basest calumny and those who repeat it are consciously or unconsciously playing Germany's game by sowing suspicion towards a faithful ally. Such a belief, if honestly held, displays an amazing ignorance of the facts, or a refusal or inability to draw the clear and logical conclusion from them. In the first place, Italy does not raise sufficient foodstuffs to feed her population. She has practically no iron, copper, lead, zinc, etc., and no coal or oil. She must import these articles in large quantities or else starve and see her industries absolutely destroyed, her prosperity ruined and her industrial population thrown completely out of employment. It is self-evident that Italy must have these articles for her very existence. It was not a question of the highest price for her support—it was a question of who could and would supply these necessities. Italy *could not* remain neutral, for then neither of the belligerent groups would have supplied her needs. The Central Powers certainly could not supply Italy's needs, whereas the Entente could, and would, in return for Italy's support.

But this motive, compelling as it is, does not account for the courage and enthusiasm with which Italy poured her whole soul into the war. Above and beyond all of the

Giolittian arguments of self-interest, of the ancient feud of Church and State, and of the traditions of the Triple Alliance, there burned brightly in the Italian heart and mind the memory of the wrongs suffered for centuries at the hands of Austria, of the millions of Italian souls unwillingly held under the Austrian yoke, and of the teachings of Mazzini and the other Italian patriots who preached and suffered and died for Italian unity. In a word, it was "Italia Irredenta" which carried the day, brought Italy into the war, and sustained her through her darkest hours. No student of Italian affairs with whom I have talked, whatever his nationality or political creed, denies this.

### *Effect of America's Entry into the War.*

I cannot leave this point without mentioning the tremendous effect on Italian morale caused by America's entrance into the war. Practically every Italian family has one or more relatives in the United States. The letters from these relatives, and they themselves on their return to Italy, have built up around the name, "America," a tradition such as surrounds no other name they know. America is invariably painted as a country of infinite opportunity, infinite wealth and infinite justice. In the minds of some Italians there may have been lingering doubts as to whether or not Giolitti and his adherents were right, and as to the wisdom of Italy's entrance into the war, but all these doubts vanished when America came in. Here was America dispassionately viewing Europe's struggle from a distance, with no axe to grind, with no age-long ambitions to fulfill, and with the vision of three years of frightful warfare clearly before her eyes—with all this, America voluntarily chose to enter the war and to enter it on Italy's side. There could no longer be any doubt as to the justice of Italy's cause because *America* had voluntarily espoused that cause. Nor could there be any doubt as to the final outcome. This absolute trust in America was one of the strongest evidences of the genuine admiration with which our country was regarded in Italy. When the American troops at Chateau Thierry in June, 1918, stopped the fourth German drive, and when they gave such a splendid account of themselves in the Allied offensive which started the following month, we Americans in Italy naturally felt extremely elated, and, I daresay, showed it. It was a

wonderful satisfaction to us, not to say relief, to find that our hastily raised armies could meet the German veterans on more than terms of equality. Much to my surprise, I found little sign of this enthusiasm reflected on the part of the Italians. At first I was unable to account for this, until the reason was gradually, but unmistakably, borne home to me. When the American troops at last were face to face with the Germans in battle, the Italian was never for a moment in doubt as to what the result would be. He received our successes as naturally to be expected and, therefore, with apparent unconcern, much in the same way as he regarded the rising and the setting of the sun; both were perfectly natural phenomena.

*Italy Entered the War Whole-Heartedly.*

Italy, having entered the war, entered it with might and main. Within a month she had mobilized under arms an army of 4,500,000 men, which is more than the United States, with three and one-half times the population of Italy, raised in a year and a half. Ninety per cent. of the living male population born between the years 1872 and 1900 were called to the colors at one time or another, the remaining ten per cent. being people in the civilian employ of the Government, in essential industry or physically incapacitated. Italy's losses amounted to 1,600,000, of whom 480,000 were killed or died of wounds and disease. This death list is approximately eight times as large as the death list in the American army, so that, considering the relative population of Italy and the United States, Italian losses in killed were proportionately twenty-five times as great as those of the United States. There is not one of us who has not lost relatives or dear friends. If it were possible for us in our minds to magnify this number by twenty-five, we would have some idea of the losses Italy bore. I say "some idea," for the figures alone do not actually represent the loss. Italy, being a poor country, was unable to extend adequate help to the families and dependents of those who had made the supreme sacrifice, nor should we overlook the fact that the average Italian family has very little invested capital and lives largely on the current earnings of its men.



*Caporetto.*

When speaking of Italy's contributions and efforts in the war only too often I am met with inquiries about Italy's one great defeat. It would seem that the only feature of the Italian war that has been heard of outside of Italy is "Caporetto." Why should we forget the three splendid campaigns in which the Italian army faced a numerically superior force which held all the strategic positions, and yet drove this force steadily back into the mountain strongholds, while foot after foot of "Italia Irredenta" was being redeemed? No more gallant fighting against overwhelming odds, or stronger natural defensive positions, was waged in the whole war. It is a fact, though rarely appreciated, that Italians held a line as long as the line in France, with almost impenetrable mountains before them and with their own open plains, supporting the industrial life of Italy, behind them. Advance for Italy was slow and costly. But let her own line be pierced at one point and, due to the unfavorable geographical position, a large part of her line must crumble. This was clearly appreciated by the Central Empires, and a stroke against Italy was carefully prepared for the fall of 1917.

The German General von Berthier had developed a totally new system of attack against trenches, known as the infiltration system. This had been used with phenomenal success on the Russian front, particularly in the capture of Riga. Von Berthier's veterans, flushed with their victory, and confident of the success of their new tactics, were transferred to the Italian front. The Russian army had now completely collapsed and large German reinforcements of men and materials were sent to Austria. It was decided to concentrate the force of the attack on the Italian Second Army at Caporetto. Long and careful preparation for this attack was made behind the Italian lines as well as in front of them. Forged copies of leading Italian newspapers were printed, containing the most alarming accounts of German victories and Allied defeats. The German army was even said to have landed in Sicily and to be ravaging the country. Perfect forgeries of the London Daily Mail were printed in Switzerland, containing accounts of Irish rebellions and great general strikes throughout England, as well as defeats of the British fleet. These forged newspapers were widely circulated in the

trenches, for, unfortunately, the Italians did not censor the newspapers going to the front, believing that censorship at the place of publication was sufficient. The families of soldiers at the front were induced to write the most alarming accounts of conditions at home and to beg the men to return to them.

In August the Pope issued his famous peace note. This had a great effect on the soldiers. German agents told them that the Holy Father wanted peace, that only the capitalists and ruling classes wished to continue the war for selfish purposes, and that it was their duty as Christians to cease fighting. Italian-speaking troops from the Trentino, Trieste, Istria and Fiume were placed opposite the Second Army. It is probable that these troops were not in the plot, but at any rate they fraternized with the Italian troops, arguing, "It is all wrong for Italians to be fighting Italians. We are brothers and belong to the same race, and have no quarrel with each other." The up-shot of it was that each side agreed that should the other be ordered to attack they would not resist. The night before the offensive, the Austrians removed their Italian-speaking troops and filled their places with Jugo-Slavs, who hated the Italians bitterly. The following day, when the attack took place, at first the Italians did not resist, believing that their Italian friends were attacking. It was not until the Jugo-Slavs were in the Italian trenches that they discovered that they had been trapped.

When the German preparations were quite complete, the offensive was launched against the Italian Second Army. The new infiltration tactics were used for the first time on the western front. They took the Italians completely by surprise, as they did the English Fifth Army the following May, and the French at Chemin-des-Dames the following June. One of the first shots fired, by bad luck struck the Italian telephone central and put a large part of the communications out of commission. Simultaneously with the attack, a large number of Italian-speaking Austrian subjects, dressed in the uniform of Italian officers and non-commissioned officers, swarmed through the Italian lines shouting confusing and contradictory orders, ordering a retreat and generally spreading confusion. When it is remembered that the Italians themselves speak many dialects, it is easy to see how such a ruse could, and did, succeed.



Reports of wholesale treason among the Italians were spread far and wide by the Austrian propagandists. No one was considered too high or too loyal to be besmirched by these reports. In addition, hundreds of false orders had been prepared in advance, and were transmitted throughout the Italian lines. The result was inconceivable. Armies that had been uniformly and gloriously successful through three campaigns, suddenly heard news of a tremendous defeat. They could hardly believe it, until the reports of treason reached their ears. These reports seemed to give the only clue to this strange and sudden collapse. They spread like wild fire, gathering momentum and color by the way. When strange and conflicting orders were received, the officer receiving them had no way of knowing whether or not they were genuine orders or forgeries, and, if genuine, whether or not the officer issuing the order was loyal. For a while everything was chaos.

General Cadorna, seeing the enemy pouring through the gap in his line caused by the defeat of the Second Army, had the choice of but two moves. If he attempted to hold ground on either flank he ran the risk of having his force divided and his entire army annihilated. By dropping back the flanks he could still close the gap and reform on a new defensive line. He chose the latter and safer course. Many of the officers on receiving orders to evacuate the strong positions which had been torn from the enemy in three campaigns at the cost of so much blood, refused to obey the order and retained their positions until surrounded by the enemy. They fought until the last man was killed, not one surrendering. Leonidas at Thermopolae gave no greater example of personal courage. Many other officers, after transmitting the order to retreat, broke their swords and committed suicide rather than obey it themselves.

Then followed the heart-breaking retreat of the Italian army across the plains of the Friuli and the Veneto. The very elements were against them. On reaching the Tagliamento, this river was so swollen by floods from the mountains that the Italian bridges were swept away and thousands were drowned in the crossing. An English officer who was there told me that the crossing of the pursuing Austrians could be compared only with the historic crossing of the Red Sea. By the time the Austrians arrived the flood had vanished as suddenly as

it came and the Austrian army crossed the river bed hardly wetting their shoe tops. Finally, the Italian armies were rallied behind the Piave and on a line from Mt. Grappa across the Asiago Plateau. They were literally fighting with their backs to the precipice, for when they finally stopped the Austrian drive, they were on the last ridge of the plateau. Four thousand feet below them lay the Venetian Plain and beyond it the most populous and prosperous sections of Italy, whose capture meant Italy's death knell, and for the Allies the loss of the war. It was a tense and dramatic moment, and one which I shall never forget, as we eagerly watched for every word from the front. Mt. Grappa, the key to the whole line, and often called the Gibraltar of Italy, was captured and lost nine times. In the space of about three weeks, Italians had constructed two roads from the plain up the nearly vertical face of the hills to the plateau above. These roads, marvels of engineering skill which I have heard described by American officers as the eighth wonder of the world, were practically the only means of supply for the armies on the plateau. They were supplemented by steel suspension cables on which little cars were hauled, carrying supplies.

### *The First Battle of the Piave.*

The first battle of the Piave I consider one of the great military marvels of the war. The Italian army, utterly defeated, with nearly all its artillery and ammunition abandoned, its transportation destroyed, its morale utterly shaken, with stories of treachery being spread broadcast by its enemies, this army almost literally bare-handed and sometimes fighting knee-deep in snow, stopped and held the Austro-German army, flushed with its victory and with all the strategic positions in its hands. It was at this point that the historic phrase, "di qui non si passa" was coined. "Mt. Grappa" is to the Italian what "Verdun" is to the French—an eternal glory. Why is it that we must remember only the unfortunate defeat and forget this splendid victory? That the Italians fought hard is proven by the fact that their losses the first day were 29,000 killed and wounded, while for a month and a half their daily losses ran from 9,000 to 12,000.

There seems to be a general misunderstanding that

the Austrian drive was checked, not by the Italians, but by the French and British who were sent to aid them. Without detracting one whit from the latter, I wish to say emphatically that the drive was checked on the line of the Piave, Mt. Grappa, and the Asiago, entirely by the Italians *before* a single French or British soldier arrived in Italy. The 100,000 British and 80,000 French who were sent to Italy's aid were stationed, on their arrival, at Padova, behind the Italian lines.

This was quite proper, as at that time no one knew how far the enemy propaganda had succeeded in disorganizing the Italian armies, or if, and where, another collapse would take place. The French and British were held in reserve to be thrown into the line in case weakness developed at any point. Such weakness did *not* develop, and the battle was definitely over by the middle of December when seven feet of snow in the mountains made further fighting impossible. Two weeks later, and not until then, the British and French troops took their positions in the line to relieve exhausted Italians.

Reports were widely circulated that a large number of Italians, even officers of high rank, were executed for treason as a result of the defeat. Whether this be true or not I have never found out. The fact is that the Government has always denied it, and has in numerous cases publicly prosecuted those individuals, including two deputies, who spread the reports. In no case was the defendant able to substantiate the report, and, therefore, we may safely say there was no truth in it. It was another one of the damnable lies which the enemies of Italy have been so industrious in circulating.

### *Italian Hardships.*

Nearly all the food and winter clothing of the Italian armies had to be abandoned at Udine. As a result, the food conditions throughout Italy the following winter were frightful. Stocks were reduced to the vanishing point in order that the army might not starve. People went from house to house, begging one blanket off each bed to keep the soldiers in the mountains from freezing to death. No coal was permitted for private consumption, heating, etc. And what little could be obtained for essential industries cost \$200 per ton and was of very inferior quality. No gasoline or petroleum could be purchased at any price and the prices of food were from



two to three times as high as in America. When one considers how cheap the living was in Italy before the war the effect of this can almost be imagined. To make matters worse we had the coldest winter known in a generation. Yet, through it all, there was never a murmur of complaint, but only a grim determination to see things through, cost what it might. Never a word of recrimination was heard. With no fuss or feathers, everyone seemed to get his or her shoulder to the wheel and prepared for the spring campaign. As a sample of the energy and ability of the people, I might mention the fact that the Ansaldo Company, though frightfully handicapped by lack of coal, steel and labor, was able to turn out field artillery at a rate greater than that reached in the whole United States, with all the resources of our country and our 110,000,000 people.

As though Italy had not already suffered enough at the hands of her enemies, nature had reserved for her an even greater affliction. The Spanish Influenza broke out during the winter of 1917-1918 and raged throughout Italy with a severity probably not equalled in any other country. The deaths from this scourge are estimated at over a million. All public funerals were forbidden and all burials took place at night. So horrible were the conditions that at times many bodies had to be buried without coffins in a common grave.

How Italy got through this terrible winter without collapsing will always be a mystery to me. Only people with a stern determination and inspired by an ideal could have persevered. It would be useless to try to depict the suffering, but I wish that my pen had power to draw a picture of the bravery and actual cheerfulness with which it was endured. By spring the army miraculously had been re-equipped, thanks largely to the foresight of the Perrone Brothers, those geniuses who are at the head of the Ansaldo Company.

### *The Second Battle of the Piave.*

With the opening of the spring campaign there was comparative inactivity on the Italian front. The people of America will probably remember the disheartening news which was daily received from the French front. On the twenty-first of March, the first great German offensive of 1918 was launched, and for the next three months it seemed that nothing could stay the onrush of

our enemies. Wherever they struck the Allied line, it seemed to crumble under their pressure. I can safely say that the darkest days of the whole war were in June, 1918. One never heard a laugh and rarely saw a smile. People spoke in a subdued tone, and even those who were about the streets seemed to walk as though under a burden. We heard constant reports of an Austro-German concentration on the Italian front. Daily we were expecting the great drive and wondering if the sad scenes being witnessed in France were to be re-enacted in Italy. In the middle of June the long expected news was flashed that the Austrians, heavily re-enforced by Germans, had crossed the Piave. It seemed to us behind the lines that the end was in sight, but General Diaz was not a man to be easily discouraged. Through the tedious winter he had reconstructed the Italian army and it was now to prove its worth. The long heralded Austro-German drive was literally stopped in its tracks, and the Huns were hurled back across the Piave leaving 46,000 prisoners behind. Grim old Orlando embraced the messenger who brought the news and kissed him, and then rushed to the Palazzo Montecitorio, where Parliament was in session and broke in upon the deliberations, waiving the despatch and shouting the glad news. I do not believe that anyone in America can appreciate what this meant. This was the first Allied victory in 1918, following a long and disheartening series of defeats. The British division on the Piave played a splendid part in the battle, but nevertheless the forces were overwhelmingly Italian and the credit must be given to Italy. There was no question then of fighting a demoralized enemy. The Huns were flushed with victory, their morale at the highest, their preparations thorough, their re-enforcements of German troops, particularly artillery, formidable, and their defeat was complete. What effect this first defeat had upon the enemy morale, and how great or small a part it played in the final defeat of that year, I am unable to say. But this I *do* know, had the enemy been successful in putting Italy out of the war, seventy-four Austrian divisions and numerous German divisions would have been released for service on the French front. With the forces as delicately balanced as they were until August, I fear the chances would have been very greatly in Germany's favor. Certainly the end of the war would

have been indefinitely postponed. If this second battle of the Piave did not save the Allied cause, it at least very materially shortened the war and saved hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers and billions of dollars. It is one more debt we owe Italy and one not always appreciated, or paid.

### *The Summer of 1918.*

Through the summer there was comparative inactivity along the Italian front. On the eighteenth of July Marshal Foch launched his first offensive, which was destined to be converted into a triumphal march, ending only in the complete defeat of the enemy. Critics of Italy—many of them genuine friends of Italy—wondered why there was no Italian offensive. One heard the question on all sides, sometimes with friendly concern, but often, unfortunately, with a sneer. The reason was perfectly plain to anyone at all conversant with the facts. General Diaz had at his disposal fifty-one Italian divisions, two divisions of British and one division of French, to which was finally added a single regiment of American infantry and some American hospital units. Opposed to him were seventy-four Austrian divisions with a superiority of 1,250 guns and with all the mountain passes and strategic points in their possession. If one will turn to the map it will be seen that the Italian line followed the line of the Piave from the sea to the edge of the mountains at Mt. Grappa. From here it turned westward along the southernmost edge of the Asiago Plateau and thence to Lake Garda. It is possible that the Italians might have crossed the Piave and even progressed a considerable distance into the Venetian Plain. Had they done so, however, we must bear in mind that their entire line of communications was constantly threatened from the Asiago front. From this plateau, if the enemy succeeded in breaking through the Italian line, it would have meant the complete envelopment and disaster of any troops beyond the Piave. It would have been military suicide to have risked such a campaign. A drive into the mountain regions to the north would have met with certain defeat unless the Italian armies could have been re-enforced so as to give them a superiority of numbers, and especially of artillery. So long as they remained hopelessly outclassed in numbers and supplies the offen-



sive was utterly out of the question. The Italians repeatedly begged for some of the American re-enforcements which were pouring into France in enormous numbers, stating confidently that with 300,000 American troops and a mobile reserve, they would go to Laibach and thence to Vienna, thus ending the war by knocking Austria out of the fight and isolating Bulgaria and Turkey. I confidently believe they would have done it. The Supreme Council thought otherwise, so the Italian army was doomed to an enforced inactive defensive throughout the summer. I again draw attention to the fact that all this time seventy-four Austrian divisions were immobilized on the Italian front. Had Hindenburg had these Austrian forces as a reserve, the victory could not have been obtained in 1918.

### *The Victory of Vittorio-Veneto.*

In the fall came the Bulgarian and Turkish collapse. Although still outnumbered and outpositioned, Diaz had been enabled to supply many of his deficiencies in artillery and equipment, and determined on an offensive. On the twenty-fourth of October this offensive commenced by a crossing of the upper Piave and a drive up the Brenta Valley. Once again one of those sudden floods from the mountains caused the Piave to rise sweeping away the pontoon bridges over which the Italians had crossed. For more than two days they had to be supplied by means of dirigibles and aeroplanes, in the face of a withering fire from the enemy. Finally a crossing was made lower down the river, and General Lord Cavan, commanding the Tenth Italian Army, crossed with a force of Italians, British and French. In the meantime the Italians had carried out one of the most daring military feats of the war. A column had forced its way up the Brenta Valley, hitherto considered an impossible feat, and had succeeded in capturing Belluno, thus cutting the Austrian forces in two. A general advance was now made along the whole Piave front and the Austrians, after four days of desperate fighting, with their line of supplies severed, fell back in complete disorder. The Austrian Empire crumbled and her armies in the field, to the extent of over a million men, surrendered unconditionally to the victorious Italians. On the fourth of November the armistice was signed. Never in history has there been a more com-

plete victory or one approaching it in magnitude. An army approximately twelve times the size of Napoleon's at Waterloo unconditionally laid down its arms on the field of its defeat. The news of this defeat in Germany was the last straw, and the German armistice followed a week later.

### *The Victory Was Italian.*

There has been a disposition on the part of some not conversant with the facts to minimize the achievement of the Italian arms in the battle of Vittorio-Veneto. It has been said that the Austrian armies were demoralized, without fight, starved and lacking guns and munitions; that they were already dying and that Italy merely gave the *coup de grâce*. This is untrue. That the Austrians had sufficient men we know because we captured them; that they had sufficient guns and munitions we know for the same reason; that they were well clothed and fed we know from the excellent condition of the prisoners and from the enormous booty captured; and that they still could fight is attested by the fact that the Italian losses in the first four days of this battle reached 70,000 in killed and wounded—one-quarter the total American losses in the whole war. As a matter of fact, the Austrians at the front were in complete ignorance of the collapse of Bulgaria and Turkey and of the internal conditions of their own country, and at first refused to believe the facts when they were informed of them after the surrender.

That this overwhelming victory must in fairness be credited to Italy is shown by the figures. Diaz's army consisted of fifty-four Italian divisions, two British divisions, one French division and one American regiment of infantry. Opposed to this army were sixty-three and one-half Austrian divisions; and while the numerical strength of an Austrian division was less than that of an Italian division, the enemy forces still outnumbered the Allies. The Italians had on their side nine hundred and twelve thousand combatants, while the Austrian divisions totalled one million and seventy thousand fighting men. The severest fighting took place around Mt. Grappa and up the Brenta Valley, where none other than Italian troops were engaged. As I have mentioned, Italian losses in four days of this battle reached 70,000. The British lost about 12,000, the French a smaller number, while the Americans lost one killed and seven wounded.



In the Mt. Grappa sector, the American Y. M. C. A. had established some fourteen relief stations, and during the battle these stations attended to more than 8,500 Italian wounded. American motor ambulances evacuated from this sector to the base hospitals on the plain below, more than 2,200 Italian wounded. It must be remembered that this number does not include the slightly wounded, nor those too severely wounded to be moved, nor, of course, does it include the killed. Neither does it include the wounded handled by the Italian forces, and it covered but one small sector of the line. Allied observers are of the opinion that the Italian losses actually exceeded the 70,000 I have mentioned.

The Italians, high and low, were deeply grieved by the lack of appreciation outside of Italy for their great victory. I never once heard any undue boasting, or have I ever heard an Italian say, "Italy won the war," nor expressions similar to those heard only too frequently in other Allied countries. But the Italians *did* say, and from the bottom of their hearts, that where there was so much glory it seemed there should be enough to go around, so that each Ally might have her just share. No one can deny the justice of this, and no one who will examine the facts can deny Italy a very large meed of praise for her part in the general victory. Nevertheless, Italy was not allowed to satisfy her wholly natural pride by bringing the surrendered Austrian fleet into Venice where her people might have an ocular demonstration of the victory, although this was expressly provided for in the armistice.

### *Reverence for President Wilson.*

The Italian's gratitude to America was cumulative, it increased from mouth to mouth, and, to them, all the power and attributes of the country were personified in President Wilson. The almost childlike reverence with which the plain people in Italy regarded the American president amounted in many cases practically to worship. The soldiers had his picture with them in the trenches, and burned candles in front of it. Hardly a farm house or small shop but had his picture alongside an image of the Virgin Mary, and it was no unusual sight to see one candle burning in front of the Virgin and two in front of the President. He was referred to in all seriousness and with the deepest reverence as "The

American Saint" and "The Messiah from the West." People everywhere believed that he was to bring a new order of justice for all. On the occasion of his visit to Italy, the enthusiasm of his reception amounted almost to frenzy. Shopkeepers who told me they would not walk across the street to see their own King (who, by the way, is enormously popular) stood on the street for hours and fought for places where they might have a glimpse of "The Prophet of the Rights of Man." People kissed the hem of his daughter's skirt on the steps of St. Peter's, and held up their babies for her to bless. Foreigners who had lived in Rome for thirty-five years and upward and had seen most of the great personages of the world come and go through the Eternal City, all testified that never had such a genuine, spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm been displayed as the triumph of America's President called forth.

### *Italy's Naval Victories.*

On the naval side, Italy's achievement was truly remarkable. Since returning to America I have been surprised on a number of occasions to have people ask me why the Italian fleet remained inactive throughout the war. The surprise of my questioners has been even greater than mine when I have replied that the Italian Navy sank more enemy naval tonnage than all the other Allied fleets combined. Should anyone doubt this statement, its accuracy can easily be substantiated by reference to the published reports. It is true that the Italian battle fleet remained inactive in its base port, but so did every other Allied fleet, with the one exception of the British Grand Fleet. Even the Grand Fleet was compelled to spend many months of watchful waiting for "The Day" when the Germans would come out. The fact remains that the Italian fleet accomplished its strategic mission to the last degree. This mission was to prevent Austrian ships, military or merchant, from taking to the high seas. Not a single enemy surface craft succeeded in escaping from the Adriatic. All the navies of the world could not have done more. The Austrian fleet refused to come out and offer battle, and it was as hopeless to think of attacking this fleet in its base ports as it would have been to attempt a naval attack on the German bases. It is not to be inferred, however, that the Italians allowed the Austrian ships

to remain securely in their harbors. Attack after attack was made in these harbors, giving the world inspiring examples of clever, scientific ingenuity coupled with great personal initiative and daring. One officer of my acquaintance succeeded in entering the Harbor of Cattaro (one of the most strongly defended of the Austrian bases) on four occasions and sinking six ships in the harbor. Italian motor boats, only sixteen meters long, constantly cruised at night among the Dalmatian Islands and off the ports of Trieste, Pola, Cattaro, etc., in attempts to locate and destroy Austrian vessels which might venture to put to sea. Italian submarines constantly blockaded these ports, while Italian destroyers and torpedo boats cruised incessantly throughout the length of the Adriatic. An Allied mobile barrage, consisting of trawlers, destroyers, drifters, mine-layers, submarine chasers, etc., all under the command of Commodore Kelly, R. N., patrolled the Straits of Otranto day and night and in all sorts of weather. Although they were greatly hampered by a most serious lack of material, especially wire cable, the Italians constructed and succeeded in anchoring in the very deep waters of the Straits of Otranto an explosive net to block the passage of the German and Austrian submarines which used the Adriatic as a base.

Some of the most brilliant individual achievements of the war, achievements worthy of being ranked with the best deeds of daring and cool judgment to be found in naval history, were performed by Italian naval officers. To record all of these would be beyond the scope of this writing, but a few are so conspicuous as to be worthy of special mention.

### *Commander Rizzo's Exploits.*

In December, 1917, Commander Rizzo succeeded in entering the closely guarded Harbor of Trieste in a small motor launch, and torpedoed the Austrian battleship "Wien," and then made good his escape.

The following June, the submerged obstructions and the mobile barrage (to which had just been added two squadrons of American 110-ft. submarine chasers) had become so effective that the Austrians determined on a raid in force to clear the Straits. Two Austrian superdreadnaughts left Pola on the night of the 15th-16th of June with the intention of making a rendezvous with the



Austrian fleet off Cattaro, whence the combined forces would proceed with the attack. Commander Rizzo in a small sixteen-meter motor boat, accompanied by Lieutenant-Commander Aonzo with a similar motor boat, had been reconnoitering among the Dalmatian Islands. Motor trouble had delayed them, and they found themselves in the middle of the Adriatic just before dawn. Two large columns of smoke were observed, and Commander Rizzo knowing that no large Italian vessels were in those waters, accurately assumed that the smoke came from major enemy units, and without hesitation proceeded to the attack. These little Italian launches carried two eighteen-inch torpedos on racks which could be rigged outboard. They had a speed of twenty-four knots. On approaching, Rizzo made out two large battleships convoyed by numerous destroyers (subsequently known to be ten in number). By skillful manœuvering and proceeding at low speed he succeeded in getting through the escort of destroyers, and when within two hundred yards of the leading battleship, the *St. Stephen*, he launched both his torpedoes, scoring two hits and having the satisfaction of seeing the target ship give a great lurch and start to settle immediately. She sank in a few minutes. Rizzo immediately turned and headed away at full speed, pursued by the destroyers who had picked him up with their searchlights and opened fire. Making a neat calculation of the speed and distance of the nearest pursuer, Rizzo set a depth charge and dropped it in the destroyer's path. So nicely was it timed that it exploded directly under the bow of the destroyer, thus ending the chase. It was later reported that the destroyer sank. Meanwhile, Lieutenant-Commander Aonzo, in the second launch, proceeded to the attack of the remaining battleship. When about two hundred yards from his target he fired both torpedoes. Unfortunately one stuck slightly in the releasing gear and was deflected, passing just astern of its target. The second struck the battleship amidships, penetrating her, but as luck would have it, failed to explode. Both Aonzo and Rizzo succeeded in making their escape and returned to Ancona.

The news of this brilliant exploit reached the world about the time that the Americans at Chateau Thierry were writing a new chapter in history, and the Italian army was hurling back the Austrians on the Piave in ignominious defeat. Consequently, I am afraid that

Rizzo's achievement is not as well known and recognized in this country as it deserves to be. Coupled with the magnificent victory of the second battle of the Piave, it served enormously to hearten the Italians. Its depressing effect on the Austrians was correspondingly great. An eyewitness gave a graphic description of the scene in the Austrian Admiralty in Vienna when the news of the disaster was received. The Austrians were open and violent in their denunciations of the Germans, for it seems that the whole plan for the attack on Otranto originated with the Germans, and the Austrians were forced into it against their better judgment. Admiral Horthy, commanding the Austrian fleet, was particularly opposed to the attempt, as he knew that the Italian scouts were so active that secrecy would be impossible, and the element of surprise was counted on to carry the effort through. Of course, with the sinking of the *St. Stephen* and the disabling of the other battleship, the whole attack was called off. Thus Rizzo by his skill and daring not only destroyed the newest and strongest unit in the Austrian fleet, but undoubtedly saved many Allied vessels and lives as well.

### *The Italian Sea-Tank.*

Meanwhile, a new type of vessel, which may be described as a sea-tank, had been invented and built by the Italian navy. This tank was of rectangular shape, much resembling an ordinary scow or sea sled. The propeller was housed in a channel in the stern of the boat. On the outboard sides, fore and aft, ran two continuous chains, one to starboard and one to port, very much resembling the caterpillar treads of a land tank. On these endless chains strong claws were placed a meter apart. Commander Pellegrini, in command of this tank, approached the Harbor of Pola one dark night in July, 1918. On getting within earshot of the defense, the gasoline motor was stopped and the tank was propelled at slow speed with an electric motor running silently. On reaching the formidable boom obstructions at the mouth of the harbor, the motor was geared to the endless chains and the claws on these chains, engaging the obstruction, caused the tank to crawl out of the water and over the obstruction. In this way three lines of obstructions were crossed without attracting attention. Once inside the harbor, Pellegrini suc-

ceeded in torpedoing a superdreadnaught. Of course, he could not escape with his tank, so he sank it, first firing a red rocket as a signal to his comrades watching outside the harbor that he had been successful. Pellegrini was captured but subsequently released and returned to Italy, where he most modestly received his well deserved honors. I might mention in passing that both Pellegrini and Rizzo have expressed privately and publicly the highest admiration for the American navy.

### *A Feat of Ingenuity and Pluck.*

The Italian navy had still another surprise to spring on the Austrians. Major Pellucci, an Italian naval engineer, so modified a specially constructed twenty-one inch torpedo as to give it a speed of about a knot or a knot and one-half, and a range of twenty miles. Two handles were attached to its nose. It was also equipped with an electro-magnet, and a time clock device for exploding the charge. This strange apparatus was launched a few miles off Pola one night late in October, 1918. Pellucci and a naval doctor, in rubber suits, swam alongside the torpedo grasping the handles at the nose and steering it through all the obstructions and into the Harbor of Pola. Making out the flagship, a superdreadnaught, they succeeded in attaching the torpedo to her side by means of the electro-magnet, and after starting the clock, swam away. Just then a sentry on the flagship detected them, and, taking them prisoner, brought them on board. The Austrian Admiral came on deck and questioned the prisoners, who kept him in conversation until the torpedo was about to explode. Pellucci then informed the Admiral of what he had done and told him that he had just time to abandon ship, but that he would not be able to find the torpedo before it exploded. The Admiral, at last realizing that Pellucci was telling the truth, and the instinct of the seaman rising above his natural prejudices, congratulated the prisoners on having performed a very daring and gallant act and told them he hoped they would be spared to return to their country and receive the honors which were due them. All hands barely had time to jump overboard and swim away from the flagship when the torpedo exploded, completely wrecking her. The chivalrous Admiral made no attempt to leave his ship but perished with her.



The complete collapse of the Austrian Empire, a few days later, I feel sure prevented the Italian navy from writing several more glorious pages to this history. I hope that Americans will feel interested enough in the work of this faithful Ally to devote a little time to the study of her naval achievements in the late war. They will find themselves amply repaid.

### *Italian Generosity.*

I have mentioned before, and wish to repeat, that whatever Italy's national faults may be, bragging and self-advertisement are not among them. I wish to add most emphatically that cupidity was strikingly conspicuous by its absence. Of course, travellers will occasionally be robbed by cabmen, guides, small shop keepers, and sometimes by an unscrupulous manager of a small hotel. This happens to strangers in every country, whatever the country may be, and America most assuredly is not free from this accusation. During a year and a half in Italy in the midst of the war, I was forcibly struck with the absence of extortionate charges to foreigners, or, at any rate, to Americans. I found that my experience in this regard was not unique, but was shared by many other Americans. Of course, prices were tremendously high, but in the vast majority of cases there was but one price for native and for foreigner alike. At least one circumstance made me marvel at this absence of extortion. We had a number of American flying cadets at an Italian aviation school at Foggia. Officially, these cadets had but the rank of an enlisted man. You can imagine the surprise of the Italians when they learned that these private soldiers received one hundred dollars per month pay. Many of these young men had private means and received additional money from home. They always stopped at the most expensive hotels, dined in the most expensive restaurants, always rode in cabs and were lavish with their tips. Of course, many Italians thought that these conditions were typical of conditions in the American army, and if enlisted men had so much money to throw away, the officers must necessarily come from the traditional American millionaire class. One could hardly blame some shop keepers whose trade had been ruined by the absence of tourists, if occasionally one of them overcharged, but I can assure you that such cases were of

very, very rare occurrence, and when brought to the attention of the authorities were invariably severely dealt with.

The Italian Government was equally generous in its dealings with the Americans, and I wish to emphasize the fact that Italy is not by any means a wealthy country. In fact, her national debt as a result of her allying herself with our cause has now reached the appalling figure of more than sixty-four per cent. of her total national wealth. Nevertheless, in the course of a long series of negotiations I never once so much as heard of an attempt on the part of the Italian Government to impose any but the most fair and reasonable terms. For instance, Italy was the only Allied nation where, so far as I am aware, free transportation on the national railways was given to the American forces. They were supplied with practically an unlimited number of blank railroad warrants which could be filled in and used gratis, at discretion.

For the training of naval aviators, a naval aviation school was constructed on one of the beautiful Italian lakes, where American aviators were trained absolutely free, no charge being made for housing them, for instruction, for use or replacement of planes or their apparatus, for gasoline, oil or anything else. The Americans were simply required to feed, clothe and pay their own forces. At the naval aviation stations in Italy, which were taken over or were to be taken over by the American navy, the buildings and original equipment, including planes, fuel and even motor cars, were supplied free by the Italians. Again the Americans were merely required to feed, pay and clothe their own forces, with the further request that, owing to the great shortage of aviation material in Italy, it was hoped that we would replace the Italian machines if and when the American machines arrived in sufficient quantities. But even this was left entirely to the discretion and fairness of the Americans. Visiting American missions (and their number was legion) were invariably the guests of the Italian Government who paid all their expenses. American tugs operating along the Italian coasts were furnished with what supplies they needed at cost—frequently free—and they were overhauled and extensively repaired at the Italian navy yards absolutely without charge. When the influenza epidemic was at its height and the



sick at the newly established American base at Corfu had no better shelter than tents, the Italian Government generously turned over to us at cost, portable houses which had just been completed for housing their own sick, who in turn had to shift as best they could. Such examples of generosity could be repeated, enough to cover many pages. I have merely selected a few that occur to me at random as typical of the unfailing attitude of the Italians towards us.

### *Italian Courtesy.*

This feeling towards Americans was not merely a formal, official one on the part of the Government, but was shared in every walk of society. If anything, the reverence with which America and Americans were held was strongest among the simple country people. In traveling about the country, I have frequently been given a meal when I knew my host had barely enough in the house to keep body and soul together, but on learning that I was an American, payment would be refused. If an American inquired his way in the country, almost invariably the native would not only direct him, but would accompany him to his destination or well on his road. I have had a carabinieri (one of the military police) carry two heavy traveling bags belonging to another official and myself for nearly a mile up a very steep hill, at night, to the door of our hotel, where he saluted and indignantly refused any tip. I hardly think Italian officials traveling in our own country have often met with such treatment. Nor were my experiences exceptional. I found always that the Americans who know the Italians best, all told the same tale.

I have known many Americans in Italy. Some of them have resided there for nearly fifty years while others have been there but a few months. They were of every walk of life—diplomats, business men, small tradesmen, retired merchants, wealthy amateurs, ladies, old and young, officers of the army and navy, etc. I can state categorically that I have never met one of these who knew Italy and the Italians well, and who had taken the trouble to get their point of view, who did not love them and their country. I wish to be included in this number, and hope that perhaps these words of mine may help to add many more.

## AFTER-WORD.

You, who have read the foregoing pages are perhaps surprised to find how gallant and important a part Italy played in winning the great victory over Germany and her allies. We have heard little about it in America. I have known the writer well for many years and know him to be a truthful and fair-minded man who has travelled extensively and is a close observer. I know that he went to Italy rather impressed with the fact that she was not doing her part in the great war, because he was ignorant of the truth.

You are perhaps sorry that you did not know of the great struggle that Italy was making, so as to have shown some expression of your appreciation of the splendid valor of her army and navy and of the tremendous sacrifices of her population; but the war ended before these matters were brought to your attention. However, it is not too late to show such appreciation. Italy is having a difficult time in her reconstruction period. You can help her now. Her military and civilian blind are numerous and need assistance. A committee has been organized in this country to support the work of Miss Winifred Holt, who is over there helping the blind. Queen Elena, of Italy, has given her patronage to Miss Holt's work. The "American Observer in Italy" has written the foregoing account as his voluntary contribution to the cause. Further information can be obtained from the American Committee for Helping Italian Blind.

You are requested to send a check for any amount that you can spare to Mr. Samuel L. Fuller, Treasurer,  
111 East 59th Street, New York City.

If you are an American, I am sure that you will want to testify to your admiration for these brave Italian Allies who have contributed so much to the great victory. If you are an Italian, I know you will be glad to show your patriotism.

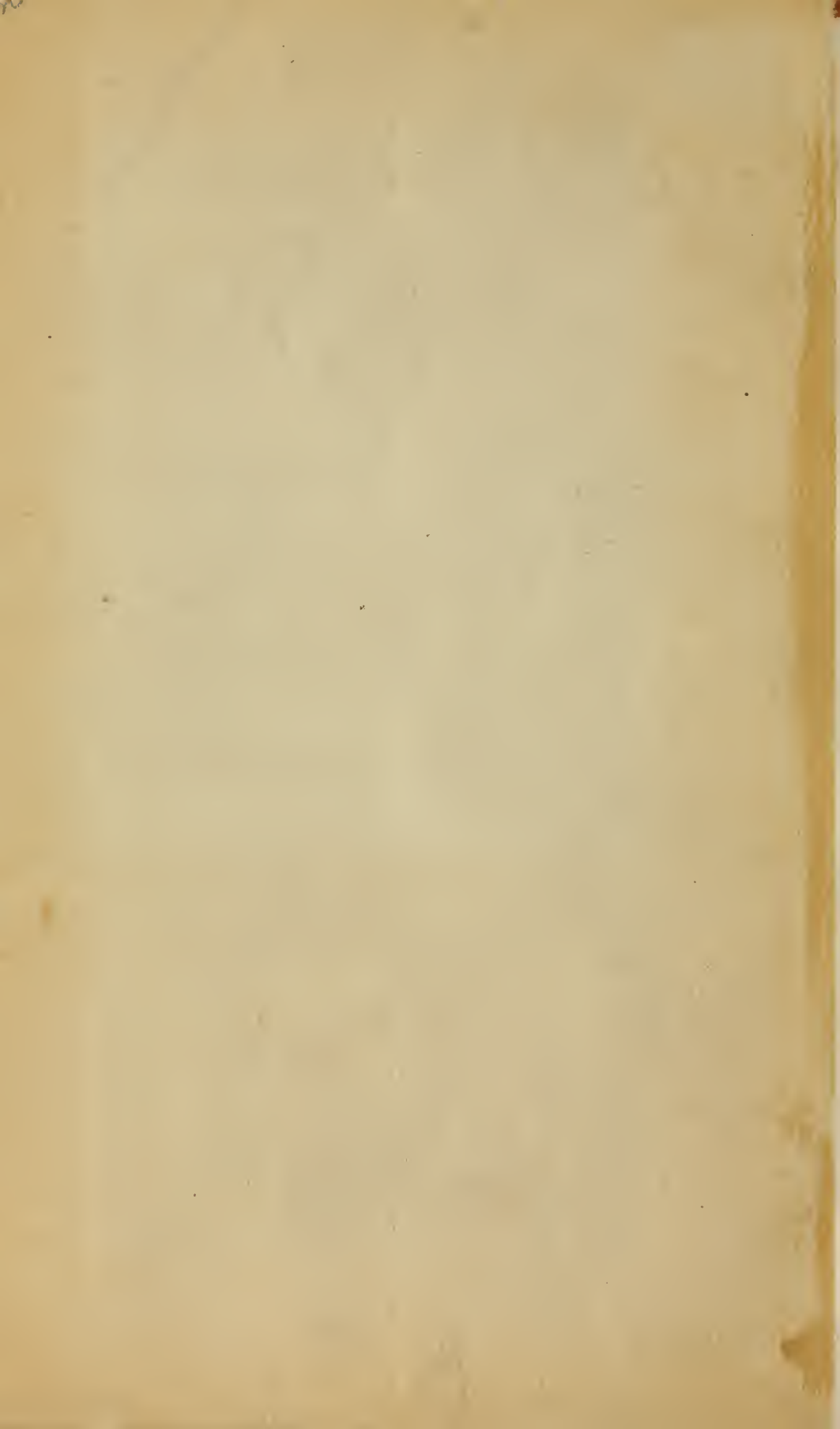
October 1st, 1919.

*HERBERT L. SATTERLEE.*









Gaylord

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